

The Historical Trail 1981



OLD FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WEST LONG BRANCH, NEW JERSEY

The Historical Trail

Yearbook of the Historical Society of the
Southern New Jersey Annual Conference of the
United Methodist Church

FOREWORD

Our committee on publication would appreciate hearing about old historic churches and personalities in our conference. We endeavor to include at least one church history each year. This year, the article is about Old First United Methodist Church, West Long Branch, New Jersey. Many churches have unpublished events that would be of interest to our readers.

For information concerning the stand of the church on social issues, we present for your reading "The Civil War and New Jersey Methodists." In this article, as sometimes in the present day, we see the slowness of our conference in supporting social reforms. Rev. Freeborn Garrettson was one of the outstanding leaders of early American Methodism. Read the article that shares excerpts from his journal and learn about his activities in the state. Have you been looking for help in finding facts about your church? The article "A Valuable Source for History" will suggest one good source.

The writers of our articles are Rev. Robert B. Steelman, pastor of Old First Church, West Long Branch, and conference historian; Rev. Robert J. Williams, pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Trenton; and Dr. J. Hillman Coffee pastor of Kynett and Terrace Churches on Long Beach Island and Chairperson of the Commission on Archives and History of the conference.

DR. J. HILLMAN COFFEE
President-Editor

OLD FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

West Long Branch, N. J.*

by

Robert B. Steelman

Old First Church in West Long Branch has been a beacon of Methodism for nearly 175 years. Built in 1809, Old First is the oldest United Methodist Church building anywhere along the New Jersey shore and one of the oldest in the Southern New Jersey Conference.

Early records, fragmentary and incomplete, make it difficult to say just when Methodism started in the Long Branch area. Some sources indicate a date as early as 1774, but that seems rather unlikely. Richard Garrettson in 1780 was probably the first regularly appointed preacher to travel through this part of Monmouth County. The Class he formed in Job Throckmorton's barn near Adelphia was undoubtedly the first in Monmouth County. Bishop Asbury preached in the vicinity in 1785, though just where, it is not possible to say.

The first official record we have dates from 1787 and comes from the Journal of Rev. Ezekiel Cooper who served the Trenton Circuit in that year. There were at least 48 preaching places on the Circuit and it took six weeks to complete a round. Since there were two preachers on the Circuit, it meant that there was preaching not more than every third week. This large Circuit covered Mercer, Burlington, Ocean, Monmouth and part of Middlesex County from the Delaware River to the Atlantic Ocean. Cooper mentions preaching at Long Branch and such names as Throckmorton, Woolley, Brewer, and Brinley. All of these names are prominent in the history of the Church. In fact, it is doubtful if there has ever been a time when a Woolley has not belonged to Old First.

On one occasion Ezekiel Cooper preached in Mr. Brinley's barn. This location was approximately where the dividing line now is between West Long Branch and Oakhurst. Cooper says, "the people were much better accommodated than they could have been in the dwelling-house. I hope they will soon have a preaching-house built here."

*Cover picture taken 1958.

It should be said that Long Branch was a name given to an area much larger than present day Long Branch. In fact, Old First was known as First Church Long Branch long after the present boundary lines were established.

A church was finally erected in 1791. It was a "free" church. That is, it was to be "Free for the use of all ministers of the gospel (bearing good character and an exemplary life and conversation) of any denominations of Christians whatsoever and for the exclusive use of the Methodists (qualified as aforesaid) every other Sunday." The ground for this Church and a cemetery was deeded for five shillings by William Brinley to Peter Parker, William Green, Frederick Maps, and Thomas Little.

The building of the church evidently sparked a revival. On a visit to Monmouth County in September of 1791, Bishop Asbury comments, "There is some stir among the people; at Long Branch, within eighteen months, as I am informed, nearly fifty souls have professed conversion."

Benjamin Abbott, a fiery Methodist preacher, served the Trenton Circuit the latter part of 1792. He describes what an early quarterly meeting (later called Quarterly Conference and now Charge Conference) was like. It was in the summer of 1792. "Our quarterly meeting was held at Long Branch. On the Saturday there appeared some little move among the people; on Sunday morning, our love feast commenced, and several spoke very feelingly: I arose and gave them an exhortation, and the Lord lay to his helping hand, and sent the word with energy, like a sharp two-edged sword, to their hearts: and they fell before the Lord, like Dagon before the ark, or like men slain in battle. Speaking their experiences was now at an end; the place was filled with acclamations of prayer and praise; some crying for mercy, others for clean hearts, and others praising God for his glorious power and grace: several professed sanctification, and others justification. We had a blessed time, and our meeting ended in great harmony."

Soon the Methodists wanted their own church, and a decision was made in 1808 to build. This decision caused a small division in the Society with some following Zenas Conger in leaving the Methodist Church and forming their own church. The eccentric Zenas Conger had formerly been a Circuit Rider. He called his new church the Independent Methodist Church. Others called them the "Congerites." In 1813, they bought the Old Free Church, but

their numbers continued to dwindle. Eventually, the old church was sold to a farmer who moved it across the highway and converted it into a barn. It stood until 1951 when it was demolished in a windstorm.

Meanwhile, the Methodists, under the leadership of the Rev. Samuel Budd, purchased ground from the Scotchman Alexander McGregor for their own church and cemetery. Work began on building the church in the early spring of 1809. When Bishop Asbury arrived in Long Branch on April 30th, only the floor beams and flooring were completed. He preached there, anyway, congratulating the people on their choice of a site but cautioning them not to build the church too small. His Journal says, "At Long Branch my subject was Acts 3:26; it was given me to speak strong words—words of God, and from God."

Asbury's travelling companion Henry Boehm records his impression of the day in his "Reminiscences" in these words: "Sunday, April 30, we spent at Long Branch. Mr. Asbury preached, from Acts 3:26, a sermon of great strength."

Work on the church continued. The cornerstone was laid on the 16th of May. The record tells us the service began at 11 o'clock and lasted until 6 in the evening. It took a long time to finish the church as the men themselves built it. The original church included what is now the main body of the sanctuary. Galleries were on three sides. There was a high pulpit with a sounding board, and tin sconces provided a bit of candle lighting on the side walls. Windows were small with little panes of glass.

An accident happened during the building of the church. Scaffolding on the roof gave way, and the workmen fell to the ground. One of them, a certain Mr. Maps, rushed to McGregor's Corner store, so much excited that he had not observed the blood marking his footprints. Meeting Mr. McGregor, he exclaimed, "O Mr. Mac, we are all dead; we are all killed!" Said Mr. Mac, "I guess not quite so bad." "Well, Jake and Till are, anyhow!" Jake and Till were injured, but all survived.

Old First served a large parish in its beginning, all the way from Sea Bright to Shark River. In fact, one of the ways Old First has served God through the years was in fostering other churches. At least twelve churches are daughter or granddaughter churches of ours. In chronological order they are: Shark River (Hamilton in Neptune), Rumson (now part of Christ Church: Fair Haven),

Little Silver, Red Bank, Eatontown, St. Luke's Long Branch, Oceanport, Asbury in North Long Branch, Simpson Long Branch (now closed), Wayside, Sea Bright and Oakhurst.

Large Circuits were the rule in Jersey in the early years of Methodism. Our church was part of the Trenton Circuit from 1785-1792. At least eighteen different ministers served the Circuit, including Ezekiel Cooper, Thomas Morrell, and Benjamin Abbott. The Freehold Circuit was formed in 1793, and West Long Branch was on that Circuit through 1833. At least 55 different Circuit Riders served during those years.

Thomas G. Stewart, in 1832, was the first minister to live in what is now West Long Branch. He was the junior preacher on the Circuit, and he came to live in a new parsonage built on the Eatontown-Long Branch Turnpike. It served as a parsonage until 1860. The home is still standing at 1049 Broadway.

An interesting situation occurred while Rev. Stewart was minister. Prayer meetings were held in private homes. Stewart said the people in the neighborhood of Long Branch "flock to the prayer meetings, held in private houses, so that we are compelled to conceal them from the public, lest they come in such multitudes that could not be accommodated." Imagine that!

Then in 1834 Long Branch was taken off the Freehold Circuit and became a separate charge. Rumson, Eatontown, and Tinton Falls were called the "out appointments" in connection with this church. There was also preaching at Poplar School House. The Rev. John Knox Shaw, later founder of Pennington School, was the preacher at that time.

One source of information about both church and community are excerpts from the Journal of William R. Maps. Mr. Maps was an eminent man in church and community. He served his church in such positions as Sunday School Superintendent, Class Leader, Steward, and Trustee. In the community he was a business man, member of the Board of Education, County Freeholder, and one of the founders and first president of the Long Branch Banking Company, the first bank in Long Branch.

His diary tells of the comings and goings of the various preachers, revival services, and camp meetings. His sister Elizabeth's wedding he calls "the first temperance wedding ever known in this section of the Country." June 18, 1834, he records the forming of a Temperance Society with 152 members. He also relates the day to day

happenings in his small community and at the shore. He writes of the joys of marriage and birth and with pathetic sadness tells of his infant son's death and later that of his young wife.

At the close of 1843, he writes: "Thus ends the year 1843, the time predicted by the Millerites for the winding up of the world's drama and the ushering in of the millenium. Heaven has yet deferred this important crisis. Showing the uncertainty of human calculations."

I don't know if the Millerite prediction of the end of the world had anything to do with it or not, but 1843 brought a great revival to Old First. Maps calls it "the greatest religious excitement ever known in these parts." Twenty were converted at one meeting and thirty at another. On January 22, 1843, 110 persons joined the church. Altogether, 220 members were received on probation in one month's time.

One result of the revival was the necessity of enlarging the church. Twelve feet were added to the west end of the building, and the galleries were moved back. The pulpit's sounding board had previously been removed and the high-backed pews already lowered.

The Conference of 1844 reported 535 white and 50 colored members on the charge, 3 Churches and 3 Sabbath Schools with 220 scholars and 38 teachers.

Old First in these years served God through its sons and daughters who were called to enter the church's ministry and to serve as ministers' wives. One to enter the ministry was Lewis Maps. A brother of William Maps, he became a minister of distinction in the New Jersey Conference, though dying at an early age. Samuel T. White was another.

Another family of note was the Throckmorton family. This family, for years, maintained a "preacher's room" where any minister was welcome to stay at anytime. Numbered among their guests was Bishop Asbury. William Throckmorton died in 1861, but three of his daughters each married Methodist preachers: Billy Barnes, Samuel Jacquett, and William Franklin. A son, Samuel, entered the ministry.

William Maps' daughter Hannah Maria became the wife of Rev. Thomas Hanlon who for many years was the mainstay of Pennington School.

The forming of a second church in Long Branch, first called Second Church, then, Centenary, and now St. Luke's necessitated some changes. One of these was an agreement to sell the parsonage,

divide the assets, and each church build its own. Accordingly, the Trustees of Old First bought ground on Locust Avenue near the church; and in 1860, built the home still used by Old First's parsonage family.

Old First continued to prosper. Revivals kept bringing new members into the church. The members were desirous of making improvements to the church, and 1874 was the year. The changes were considerable.

This is what they did. The present chancel area of thirteen feet was added to the east end of the building. The side galleries were removed, and windows were enlarged. The bell tower was added; and the bell, weighing 1017 pounds, was placed in it. In addition, all of the old church furnishings were removed and replaced with new. "So there is nothing visible in the present church which belonged to the old or as it was in the old church except the altar railing."

The last Service held in the church before the improvements was on July 26, 1874. Services were then held in the School House across Wall Street until work on the church was completed in November.

Thanksgiving Day was the grand reopening and dedication. Fourteen ministers were present. Services began with the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Bishop Janes preached from Hebrews 7:25 and led in the Act of Dedication. Rev. George H. Neal preached in the evening.

Reporting on the dedication, the Christian Advocate for December 17th said, "The old and honored M. E. Church at Mechanicsville, N. J. (a former name for West Long Branch), Rev. George Reed, pastor, having been thoroughly remodeled and greatly improved, was re-opened on Thanksgiving Day. Bishop Janes . . . officiated. Rev. A. E. Ballard, presiding elder, announced that no money was needed as the bills were all paid. A thank offering was given to the stewards. . . . The church commenced a new era of usefulness in the pathways of our Methodism." The total cost was about \$4,000.

The years 1884-1886, under the pastorate of the Rev. Benjamin C. Lippincott, were impressive years. A revival in 1884 brought 92 into the church, including the preacher's son and his future wife, Addie Hulick. He summed up his three years' labors at Old First: "During these years I have received 208 on probation. Baptized

127. Preached and made addresses to the number of 627. I have attended 133 funerals. . . . During my pastorate, new horse sheds have been built. . . . We built also a new hall on the property, finished and furnished it at a cost of some \$2200. (This is the present Social Hall). We have a mortgage of \$850 on the building. We also put up a back kitchen to the parsonage, put in furniture, a parlor carpet, heater, etc., costing in all \$325, *All paid*. I have had plenty of work to claim all my attention. The Official Record has been final and the members have helped me in the work. I have received more presents on this Charge than in any other that I ever filled. I close this short record with thanksgiving to Almighty God and with kindly feelings and Christian love to all."

As the 20th Century approached there was an increasing concern evidenced for temperance work. The District Superintendent noted in his report to Annual Conference, "At some places our brethren have been making aggressive warfare against this curse of all curses. Notably has this been true of Long Branch where public sentiment has been aroused, licenses have been refused, and violators of the law have been punished. A Law and Order League has been organized, and Brother Shaw is the president. He is ably sustained not only by the pastors of all our Churches but by the other pastors and by the Church generally."

Old First had 246 members in 1900, and there were 300 in the two Sunday Schools of West Long Branch and Wayside. The pastor Rev. John W. Morris received \$1,000.

An active women's organization did much for the Church. It provided a monthly social outlet for the women and they were and still are adept at raising money to care for the parsonage, general church causes, and missionary endeavors. The United Earnest Workers was organized October 8, 1881, to which men as well as women could belong. Thirty-six men and seventy-seven women became charter members. Dues were twenty five cents for the ladies. Men were required to pay twice as much. The United Earnest Workers became the Ladies Aid, February 3, 1885. Later, both a Women's Foreign and a Women's Home Missionary Society were organized. Harvest suppers were for many years a popular means of raising funds.

The years of the first decade of the new century were active. The beautiful, stained glass windows were installed in 1902 as memorials to those whose names they bear. A year later the church

was painted inside and out and recarpeted. "The people were inspired to work."

1905 was a year of revivals. Throughout the New Brunswick District, some 1200 conversions were reported, 48 of them at Old First. The parsonage was also rebuilt and enlarged that year under Rev. Eli Gifford's leadership at a cost of about \$4,000.

The big event of the decade was the celebration in 1909 of the Centennial of the building of the church. The Rev. C. B. Fisher was minister. The Centennial Jubilee took place on Sunday, August 15, 1909, followed by a Reunion and Harvest Home on Wednesday of the same week. Mrs. Rebecca Hulick was in charge of the Harvest Home.

Jubilee Sunday lasted all day, beginning with a Lovefeast at 9 A.M. and services at 10:30 A.M., 2:30 and 7:45 P.M. The Long Branch Daily Record had a full report of the services in its Monday edition. According to the article, no less than 3,000 attended the four services. Bishop Thomas B. Neely preached the Centennial Sermon from Ephesians 5:27. Chairs filled every inch of available space at this service.

During the afternoon meeting, five former pastors, B. C. Lippincott, Willis Reeves, Pennington Corson, J. W. Morris and Eli Gifford all spoke. Rev. Fisher preached in the evening and the District Superintendent Dr. John Handley presided at all the services. Special commendations were given the choirmaster Charles A. Poole and the cornetist Mr. Willis A. Woolley.

The building of Oakhurst Church in 1910 took many members from Old First and left it with only the small community of West Long Branch to serve. Things went along after this, but with no great advancements.

A new pipe organ was installed in 1915. Half the cost of \$1700 was paid by Mr. Andrew Carnegie who did the same for many churches. The first Boy Scout Troop numbering 26 boys was started in 1917. Our church in 1981 continues to sponsor Boy Scouts and Cubs. One of our members, Mr. LeRoy Johnson, has been a Scout Leader for over 50 years. Also in 1917, a group of Camp Fire Girls was started in the church.

Prior to the great Depression things seemed to pick up in the old church, although much remained to be done. Rev. Johnson reported an unusually strong and active Ladies Aid in 1926. Rev. Carl Reamer, minister 1927-1929, reported a 25% membership

increase, 33% salary increase and a 200% increase in World Service contributions during his tenure; yet he laments, "the spiritual tide has not risen as it should. In the last analysis statistics do not mean a great deal, but spiritual impressions are eternal."

When the Rev. Stacy Myers arrived as minister in 1932, Old First was badly in need of repairs. Although the depression was bad, he and the people set to work. Inspired in part by Mrs. Laura Chamberlain Beach and with the men of the church doing most of the work and donating their time, the church was transformed. The old gave way to the new. Even the altar rail, so long a part of the church, was removed, and the lovely colonial interior, now so beloved, was the result. The District Superintendent said that these people "as a result of their tireless efforts, have one of the most beautiful interiors to be seen in our Conference." The Beach Memorial Chancel was erected in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Edward M. Beach by their son, Dr. Edward W. Beach of California.

The rededication of the church took place on Sunday afternoon June 16, 1935. Bishop Ernest G. Richardson preached and led the Dedication Service. Other events of celebration took place that week, including a 75c turkey supper.

What have been some of the things that have occupied the attention of the church since then? In 1939, came the merger of Methodism when the Methodist Protestant, Methodist Episcopal South, and Methodist Episcopal Churches became The Methodist Church. This brought changes to Old First, too. The Ladies Aid and Mission Societies became the Women's Society of Christian Service, now the United Methodist Women. The young people's Epworth League became the Methodist Youth Fellowship.

One of the church's most esteemed men Mr. A. Randolph Chinery died in 1942. For 60 years this devoted Christian was a member of Old First Church. He was the church sexton, Superintendent of the Cemetery for 54 years, Official Board member, Recording Steward, Communion Steward and Sunday School Superintendent. The Official Memorial Resolution said, "no man, in pew or pulpit, has served the church in this place more devotedly or more faithfully." In his memory, an Altar Cross, Candelabra, pulpit fall, altar scarf and Bible marker were dedicated on Sunday evening, January 3, 1943.

The 140th Anniversary of the church in 1949 brought to Old First as an afternoon speaker on Sunday, September 18, the Honor-

able Alfred E. Driscoll, Governor of New Jersey. This was the climax of a week's celebration.

Other church improvements were made as the 150th Anniversary Celebration of Old First neared. In 1955, a new pipe organ and chimes were installed. Then the James Atcheson Memorial Lights put a finishing touch to the colonial interior of the sanctuary and were dedicated as part of the 150th anniversary celebration.

June 28, 1959, marked the 150th Celebration: The Sacrament of Holy Communion was celebrated in the morning. District Superintendent Dr. William R. Guffick spoke in the afternoon. A fellowship supper was served by the W.S.C.S. The Evening Service told the history of Old First in a "This Is Your Life Program."

The 1950's brought much growth to the church. The Sunday School under Superintendent Fred Bucherer's leadership kept growing. More space and better facilities were needed for the present day. After much planning, work, and fund raising, in 1961, a two story education building containing a church office, chapel, and 13 classrooms was erected. Consecrated in 1962, it was dedicated debt free May 2, 1965. The facilities of Old First are completely adequate to serve God in this modern age. With pride, the church trustees and congregation care for all their facilities.

The latest edition to the church came in 1971. Two rooms of our Educational Building were transformed into a Church Museum. In the ten years that have followed, the Museum Committee chaired by Louis Barbour has made a most important contribution to the life of Old First. The Museum has become the home, not only of the valued treasures of the church, but a growing collection of memorabilia from the surrounding area. Its October to April monthly Open House exhibits on the third Sunday Afternoon have featured numerous collections and bring visitors from many communities.

Old First is proud and conscious of its place in history. We seek to make it come alive for people today. Yet in no way do we want to live in the past. Our aim and purpose is to serve the Lord Christ today in ways that can touch the lives of people for God and for good. Our church of nearly 400 members seeks to fulfill God's mandate of service in the 1980's and beyond. The past has been great, but we believe the future can be equally as great.

Already we have a functioning Anniversary Committee making plans to celebrate the 175th Anniversary of Old First Church in 1984 and the 200th Anniversary of our congregation in the year

that will mark the Bicentennial of the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church. We are celebrating the past by holding yearly events prior to 1984; we will publish the history of the church in our Anniversary Year and have a year long celebration. But that won't be all, for the committee has a mandate to propose goals that can challenge our congregation in the last years of the 20th century. We may be an old church, but we have a ministry that is alive in serving people in the name of a living Christ.

On the occasion of the Church's Centennial in 1909, Rev. Willis Reeves who had pastored Old First 1887-91 read a poem he had written. The years are not the same, but its message is still pertinent.

*One hundred years ago today
Old First Church started on her way,
Her object then was souls to win,
Oh, how successful she has been.*

*Hundreds here on earth today,
Old First Church started on their way;
Thousands in the Church above,
Where now they sing redeeming love.*

*Still she stands a shining light,
To all who wander in the night,
And calls to all who pass her by,
"Tho I am old I'll never die."*

*"I have been tried for many years,
For my success I have no fears,
As long as all who in me dwell,
Obey and do His perfect will."*

*"To the triumphant Church above,
I'll carry all who Jesus love;
You stand by me and I'll stand by you,
Depend on it, I'll get you through."*

THE CIVIL WAR AND NEW JERSEY METHODISTS

by

Robert J. Williams

The Civil War was such a cataclysmic upheaval in the national life that every section of the country and every denomination was profoundly affected. The State of New Jersey and the Methodists of the New Jersey Conference and the Newark Conference were no exception. What was the response and the involvement of New Jersey Methodists in the years immediately preceding the conflict through the first years of Reconstruction? The primary materials for study include the printed minutes of the two conferences in New Jersey and several printed sermons or tracts by New Jersey Methodist clergy. Four themes emerge as an interpretive framework for this study: 1) the attitude toward slavery and black people; 2) patriotic support of the government and its conduct of the war; 3) acts of mercy and benvolence to ease suffering and declarations of concern and clemency; 4) interpretation and reflection on the meaning of the national ordeal.

An important context for understanding the response of New Jersey Methodists was the social and political milieu of the state. The Methodists tended to be more patriotic, more supportive of the war, and more opposed to slavery than many in New Jersey.

Earl Schenck Miers wrote that Hinton Rowan Helper in *The Impending Crisis in the South* called New Jersey "a second-rate free state."¹ The politics of the state was dominated by the Democratic Party which advocated States' Rights and defended pro-slavery positions. A report was adopted by the New Jersey State Senate on March 22, 1860, indicating that a state should attend to its own affairs and let the territories settle the slavery issue for themselves. In fact, the "Opposition" Party, nominally affiliated with the Republicans but reluctant to take the name, did not advocate abolition of slavery but simply opposed the extension of it.² During the course of the war, the Democratic controlled legislature would pass resolutions in support of the South, oppose the draft of men for the armies, oppose the Emancipation Proclamation, and manifest strong Copperhead sentiment. Copperhead was the term given to Northerners in sympathy with the South who opposed the war policies of the Federal government.

In the election of 1860, Lincoln received four electoral votes and Douglas three from New Jersey, New Jersey being the only free state which did not give her entire electoral vote to Lincoln.³ In the election of 1864, General McClellan carried New Jersey by a popular majority of 7291. McClellan received 21 electoral votes nationwide—the seven of New Jersey, and the votes of Kentucky and Delaware.⁴ A helpful summary of the power of the Democratic Party is the following:

The Democratic party reaped advantage from the administration's mistakes (from the New Jersey states' rights point of view,) and retained control of the legislature from 1861 through 1865, elected a governor in 1862, elected a United States senator in 1863, pushed through the legislature in 1863 resolutions advocating immediate peace, and gave the Democratic nominee for the presidency in 1864 one-third of his total of electoral votes.⁵

The Constitutional amendments during Reconstruction also faced strong opposition. The Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery was not ratified until after it had become law; the legislature tried to rescind its ratification of the Fourteenth, known as the Civil Rights amendment; and in 1870, the legislature refused to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment granting suffrage to blacks. The Methodist response to these momentous issues must be understood in this hostile political climate.

I

There can be no question that the dominant social issue leading to the Civil War was slavery and the place of the black in American society. New Jersey Methodists were slow in supporting abolition in spite of their opposition to slavery. It is surprising, given much of the criticism of colonization efforts that the Newark Conference in 1858 could pass the following resolution:

That in view of the aid given to our missions on the coast of Africa by the Colonization Society, we recommend it to the favorable consideration and support of the church generally.⁶

No other mention of the Colonization Society appears in the Minutes of either Conference during the years. As a way of handling the slave question, it had lost popularity and usefulness. Both the Newark and New Jersey Conferences in 1859 received from the

Cincinnati Conference resolutions on slavery but laid them on the table until the next annual session.⁷

The key paragraph was:

Resolved, That the Annual and General Conferences be requested to concur as to altering the general rule on Slavery that it shall read as follows: "The buying or selling of men, women, or children, or holding them, with an intention to use them as slaves."⁸

The key change was the addition of "or holding them" for this rule would not prohibit just the slave trade but would prohibit any church member from owning slaves. While the Church had always condemned slavery, it had been unwilling to take the position that a church member could not own a slave. A member was not required to dispose of all slaves if the laws of the state did not allow emancipation. The Cincinnati resolution represented a stiffening of the anti-slavery position. Frederick Norwood summarized the attitude of the Church toward slavery from the Christmas Conference in 1784 until the Civil War:

Methodist attitudes toward slavery may be charted in a general curve. It looks concave; beginning rather high on the scale of Christian awareness of moral evil, falling to the nadir in relentless compromise with the forces of the Cotton Kingdom, finally rising once again, inspired by the dual influences of revivalism and abolitionism.⁹

The section in the *Discipline* on slavery was amended for the last time in 1824 until changed in 1860. The key item in the 1824 chapter on slavery was that "the Church is convinced of the great evil of slavery, and slave-holders are prohibited from holding official positions in the Church, where the State laws will admit emancipation."¹⁰ The committee responsible for the legislation on slavery favorably reported a change in the rules to the General Conference of 1856. A vote to make the wording more denunciatory was prevented, hence, no change in 1856. That act set the stage for the Cincinnati resolutions which were presented to the two Conferences in New Jersey in 1859. The resolutions, as indicated above, were tabled until 1860.

In 1860, the Newark heard resolutions from the Erie, Cincinnati, and Providence Conferences. All had the intent of making slave-holding unlawful for all church members. The Newark Conference

voted non-concurrence on all three: the specific figures being, Erie, 106-0; Cincinnati, 98-0; Providence, 94-8.¹¹ The New Jersey minutes report that "Resolutions of 'Cincinnati,' 'Providence,' and 'Erie' Conferences on the slavery question taken up,.. and by a unanimous vote the Conference refused to concur."¹² Nationally, the Providence and Erie Rules received majority vote, but the Cincinnati Rule was actually defeated by the voting conferences. However, the border conferences did not have their votes included in the national tally.¹³ Also, in 1860, the Newark Conference appointed a special committee for resolutions on slavery. They prepared a report; it was tabled until the last morning of Conference. When it was read, it was defeated 37-67.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the Journal does not record the content of the report. While other conferences were centers of abolitionist sentiment, New Jersey Methodists clearly sought to avoid change or confrontation on the issue. This is no surprise when it is remembered that the Methodists were a part of a state that was opposed to abolition.

The General Conference of 1860 did change the chapter on slavery. Agitation between 1856 and 1860 had been so strong that passage of a new chapter seemed assured when the General Conference convened in Buffalo on May 1, 1860. The New Chapter read:

We believe that the buying, selling, or holding of human beings as chattles is contrary to the laws of God and nature; inconsistent with the Golden Rule, and with that rule in our Discipline which requires all who desire to remain among us to do no harm, and to avoid evil of every kind. We therefore affectionately admonish all our preachers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extirpation by all lawful and Christian means.¹⁵

The General Conference received 811 petitions with 45,857 signatures favoring this change; and 137 petitions with 3,999 signatures opposing the change. From the Newark Conference came one petition with 18 signatures favoring the change; from the New Jersey Conference came 3 petitions with 50 signatures opposing the change.¹⁶

During the War years the two Conferences passed long reports "On the State of the Country." These reflected the several themes that serve as the focus of this essay. In 1863 the New Jersey Conference included this about slavery:

Regarding slavery as the prime cause of the war, having rendered those now in rebellion too arrogant to bear the restraints of constitutional and judicial limitations; and

as, in the agitations of the times, the character of slavery is a subject of much discussion, we feel called upon to recall the attention of our people to the fact, that the Methodist Episcopal Church, viewing it as a great moral wrong, has long maintained on the pages of her book of Discipline, the question: "What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?"¹⁷

Note that this resolution points with pride to the *Discipline*, only three years after the Conference voted unanimously not to support the changes contained therein. The Newark Conference in the same year published similar sentiments but the resolutions of 1864 bring into focus new issues and insights.

Resolved, that while for years past we have been asking, "What shall be done for the extirpation of the evil of slavery?" We believe that God is now, in his providence, effectually answering it by the terrible arbitrament of the sword.

Resolved, that we witness with delight the rapid and radical change which is taking place in the sentiments of the people of the border states, on the question of slavery.

Resolved, That we commend to the prayers and liberality of our people the Union refugees and freedom of the South, and rejoice in the efforts made by our own and other Christian churches to ameliorate their condition, and also to supply the people of these districts regained by our arms with the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Note the theme in the first resolution that understands the War as being used by God to rid the nation of slavery and in the third resolution the approaching concern for Reconstruction.

The 1864 General Conference changed the General Rule on slavery so as to prohibit slaveholding as well as the slave trade. With affirmative action by the Annual Conferences, the last vestige of the church's sanction on slavery was removed.¹⁹ The New Jersey Conference voted 118-0 to concur with that change.²⁰

While the Conferences may have been slow in putting official statements in line with the belief of many of the Conference members, those members were speaking and writing on behalf of the anti-slavery and abolition forces. Ruliff V. Lawrence, a member of the New Jersey Conference, was described as

an abolitionist of the old school when it cost men to be such. He hated slavery, and flamed against the negro's

wrongs with the same vehemence that he argued for his country's rights. Speaking of the oppression of the colored race and the unwillingness of the nation to enfranchise them, he said: "Do you think that God is blind that he cannot see these most terrible wrongs, or heartless that he cannot be indignant at them? . . . I warn you, my friends, that such wrongs will bring the just judgments of God upon the land. Do not chide me—I dare not be silent; I hope I have too much manhood to be silent, when I see the poor and needy crushed under the iron heel of prejudice."²¹

A debate that had been carried on for years focused on the views of the Bible on slavery. The Rev. Joseph B. Dobbins, at that time pastor of the Third Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Camden, joined the fray with the publication of *The Bible Against Slavery; a Vindication of the Sacred Scriptures Against the Charge of Authorizing Slavery, A Reply to Bishop Hopkins*, published in 1864. John W. Hopkins, Episcopal Bishop of Vermont, had defended slavery as "perfectly coincident with the teachings and spirit" of the Bible.²² Joseph Dobbins had been encouraged to publish a series of articles, written in 1863, on the subject in pamphlet form by Council No. 3, of Camden Union League of America. Dobbins attacked Hopkins in that out of 16 pages of text only about four deal with the Scriptures the rest were an elaborate denial of human equality.²³ Bishop Hopkins placed the blame for the war on the anti-slavery preachers and drew the counter-attack from Dobbins that Hopkins "has been betrayed into 'political preaching;' for the pamphlet seems to be a political sermon, with the 'Bible view of slavery' for the text."²⁴ Then Dobbins developed a long and detailed argument that Scripture does not defend slavery.

A strong defense of the equality of blacks was contained in a sermon preached by the Rev. Robert B. Yard, Pastor of the Clinton St. M.E. Church and late chaplain of 1st Regiment N.J. Volunteers, 6th Corps, on the day of national humiliation, June 1, 1865, in the Central M.E. Church, Newark. On that day he said:

Among the lessons of the hour is that of the essential and original equality of the races and nationalities centering in this land.

There is never a prouder victory for man than when he rises superior to prejudice; when doing violence to preference, taste, or training, he determines to do right. Next to the disgrace of human bondage is the shame of caste, and of pride of color, or of lineage.

But I pity him who can find no better sport than to make perpetual war upon the negro. He seems to fear the promised rivalry of a people that shall yet develop eloquence, art, science, and religion in their divinest forms. The time is coming, when these people will mingle freely in society, never to lose their race-traits, but in ever abiding testimony of the power of enlightened humanity to rise superior to prejudice, and to honor the likeness of God, whether framed in ebony or in ivory.²⁶

The struggle on behalf of blacks did not end with the Civil War but continued into Reconstruction. It needs to be remembered that at the time of the Civil War, there were still a few slaves in New Jersey. An 1804 law had allowed for the gradual abolition of slavery by freeing all those born to slave parents after July 4, 1804, at their 25th birthday if a male and 21st birthday if a female. This did not free anyone born a slave prior to July 4, 1804. An act was passed in 1846 which claimed to abolish slavery; but, in reality, it only changed the name for a slave to an apprentice. It did not free any slave for it encumbered each former slave with such restrictions and obligations that it practically kept him in slavery. It would take the amendments to the Constitution to finally abolish slavery in New Jersey.

Following the war, the constitutional amendments and the status of the freedmen received attention from the churches. In 1865, the Newark Conference addressed both of these issues.

Resolved, That in the proposed constitutional amendment for abolition of slavery, we recognize the uprising of a great nation to extirpate a gigantic wrong, and to adjust its action to the laws of God and humanity; and we believe it to be the duty of every good citizen to use his influence to secure the ratification of said amendment.

Resolved, That the unswerving loyalty of our colored people North and South, their unrequited toils and sufferings in the past, as well as their present weakness and poverty, commend them to the sympathies of all Christians, and ask at our hands the aids and encouragements which they need to enable them to improve their condition.²⁶

However, the New Jersey legislature did not immediately ratify the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. It remained for a new legislature in 1866 to ratify it, after it had become part of the Constitution. The New Jersey Conference reflects dismay over the action of the legislature not to ratify the Amendment with the words:

... we must say that language utterly fails to express our deep and abiding mortification at the recent action of our own State Legislature, in refusing to sanction such a measure so inseparably connected with the future peace and prosperity of our whole country ... New Jersey must and shall stand up by the side of those States which have already decided in favor of universal freedom.²⁷

In 1866, following ratification, the Conference could "rejoice in the late action of our State Legislature."²⁸ New Jersey Methodists were forced to struggle with divisive issues but they did provide moral leadership in a state where leadership was not popular.

II

In a state highly critical of the Administration of Abraham Lincoln and of the Civil War, the Methodists of New Jersey showed great patriotic fervor and support of the national government. William Warren Sweet in *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War* stated that his thesis was "to show the importance of the Churches as an aid to the Government during the Civil War."²⁹ He believed that the Methodist Episcopal Church was a significant force in bringing to a successful close the War of the Rebellion.³⁰ The evidence from New Jersey Methodists supports that thesis.

The Methodists supported the government in spite of difficult social conditions and hostile political viewpoints. In 1862, Ruliff Lawrence preached a sermon in Salem that described how the church had been vexed and oppressed:

We were vexed and oppressed with fear that the government would be destroyed; we have been vexed and oppressed with the terribleness of the war that has actually been upon us; ... in a financial way—factories have been stopped, mercantile houses have failed, stocks have depreciated foreign governments it was feared would come and burn our seaboard towns and cities. Men and women were out of money, out of work and out of bread, and the men who had money held on to it as if it was the last they should ever see.³¹

Many of New Jersey's manufactured goods were sold in Southern markets; the legislature was Democratic and thereby pro-South; in 1861, opposition to the war was very strong in press and politics alike, but not in Annual Conference resolutions. Starting in 1862,

the Methodists defended the national government. The Newark Conference resolved in 1862:

That while we deplore the necessity of taking up arms, we see no alternative between determined resistance to wrong and the sacrifice of the liberties of the many to the pride and the mercenary ambition of the few; and that therefore with our prayers, with every element of our influence, and with all our strength, we will stand by the Government in its patriotic effort to suppress rebellion. That we can give no countenance to any proposition which contemplates the settlement of our national troubles by a separation of the States of this Union.³²

This latter resolution would be clearly in opposition to the sentiment of some politicians that the Southern states should depart in peace, but a surprisingly generous spirit was reflected in a resolution:

That in view of the intimate moral, social and commercial relations existing between the North and the South, should any of the States where slavery now exists desire emancipation, we deem it patriotic and generous for the free States to share the burdens involved in the process.³³

The Conference even defended the high taxes that accompanied the War. The New Jersey Conference in the same year encouraged support of "every good citizen and Christian" for the war effort and evidently the Methodists did respond:

We hail with gratification the enthusiastic loyalty of our congregations, as displayed in the contribution of men and means to the demands of the present emergency.³⁴

In 1863, both Conferences passed more resolutions of support, but these illustrations from the New Jersey Conference will suffice as they represent the strongest wording of any of the resolutions:

That Christian loyalty to the Government requires submission to and cooperation with the authorities duly appointed to administer its affairs, within the limits prescribed by the Constitution.

That the official acts of the Executive and of the National Congress, are in harmony with the Constitution, and, as in the cases supposed to be doubtful, the Constitution makes provision for testing their character, such acts in their execution are not to be opposed and resisted. . .

That we sympathize with the President, and head of Departments, in this trying state and condition of our National

affairs, and that nothing within our power to render, for the support of the Administration, and the most vigorous prosecution of the war for the conquest and subjugation of the rebellion, shall be withheld.³⁵

Public flag raising ceremonies during the Annual Conferences were popular throughout Methodism with the Journals recording such a service for the Newark Conference in 1863 and for the New Jersey Conference in 1864. In 1863, the Newark Conference required that Presiding Elders when presenting names of candidates for admission on trial, state whether or not those candidates were loyal to the government of the country.³⁶

The 1865 session of the New Jersey Conference continued to express their loyalty to the government but the resolutions passed in 1866 contained a note of vengeance in the midst of patriotic sentiment:

that the nation is wholly unprepared to witness the reception into the halls of Federal legislation of any of the notorious traitors engaged in the late rebellion, unwashed as they are of the blood of their countrymen, whom they have wickedly slain, and such a humiliating spectacle could not fail to afflict the heart of every patriot.³⁷

Defense of the national government was also found in sermons by Methodist preachers. Rev. Lewis R. Dunn, Pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Morristown, in an oration delivered at Morristown on July 4, 1863, provides a typical example. He said:

The rebellion is extraordinary, and extraordinary measures are essential for the public safety. And I doubt not that when the history of this rebellion is written in the future, the most serious charges brought against the government will be, not its abuse of power, not its tyranny, but that it was too lenient to the vilest traitors who ever trod upon God's footstool. The *habeas corpus* act, then, not only may be, but it should be suspended, whenever the public safety demands it.³⁸

The suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* had been a divisive issue in New Jersey politics. For example, on September 11, 1861, Colonel James W. Wall of Burlington, a Democrat, active in peace meetings and a member of the editorial staff of the *New York Daily News* was arrested by order of Secretary of War Cameron. He was confined until September 24 when he was released upon taking

the oath of allegiance to the United States. Since the arrest had been ordered from Washington, the writ of *habeas corpus* was useless.³⁹ This particular incident led to Democratic victory at the poles in both 1861 and 1862, and the following protest by the legislature in 1863:

Against all arrests without warrant; against the suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* in states and territories sustaining the federal government, "where the public safety does not require it;" and against the assumption of power by any person to suspend such writ, except under the express authority of Congress.⁴⁰

After eloquent praise of our national life, Lewis Dunn shifted his attack to the Democratic leadership in the state that was appealing for peace.

Many are now saying, "Let us make peace at any price—let us make peace." And who say this? Is it our brave soldiers on the battle-field? Is it our loyal men and women of various sections and different parties? No! but a miserable clique of rusty, corrupt and foggy politicians, who, like Judas would sell their country for thirty pieces of silver.⁴¹

He also attacked those politicians who wanted to let the South depart in peace and accept the fact of secession. He used Andrew Jackson's words, "At every hazard, and by every sacrifice, the Union must be preserved" as a way to indicate that if Jackson were president, he would "hang, or at least imprison or banish every man" who supported the dissolution of the union.⁴² Dunn defended the conscription laws passed by Congress and criticized those in New Jersey who worked to prevent the draft from being implemented in the state. He compared those who nullified the draft in New Jersey to the Tories of the Revolutionary War and the members of the Hartford Convention during the War of 1812.

The pro-Southern spirit of New Jersey was reflected in words spoken by Rev. Robert B. Yard on June 1, 1865, reflecting on his years as chaplain of the 1st Regiment of New Jersey Volunteers:

With the Southern people Jeff Davis is a saint—one of the most conscientious and devoted of Christians . . . Commendation of New Jersey is on every lip. Sensible as I am of the good opinion of others, and desirous of appreciation of myself, and of my State, I was chagrined

to find among the bitter enemies of Freedom and Union such hearty admiration of New Jersey. "She has been truer to us than Maryland."⁴³

New Jersey was a stronghold of Copperhead Democracy with the legislature and newspapers, the *Newark Journal* and the *True American*, leading the way. It was such opposition that New Jersey Methodists confronted in their defense of the government, their support of the war, and their opposition to slavery.

III

The Methodists of New Jersey were greatly involved in advocating and participating in acts of charity and benevolence to relieve suffering during the war. At a state-wide Methodist convention in 1870 in Trenton, the gathered delegates reflected upon the growth of Methodism over the previous decade and heard a report on benevolent giving. Benevolent giving peaked at \$28,702.73 in 1858 with a decline continuing until 1862 during which year only \$24,933.50 was given. It climbed throughout the rest of the war years and by 1866 the total benevolent giving was \$57,578.32. The Commentary stated:

It is remarkable how little these contributions were affected by the war; indeed, in the very midst of the conflict, they rallied from the depression they experienced at the commencement of the strife, and long before its close reached a point beyond what they had ever attained during the years of peace.⁴⁴

The growth of membership for New Jersey Methodists slowed in the decade of the 60's. It was believed this decline was because of the number of Methodists serving in the war.

In the diminished increase per cent among the membership during the last decade, the influence of the war is plainly seen. While the bloody strife did not lessen our benevolent contributions, it took away our young men, many of whom laid down their lives for their country.⁴⁵

An important service rendered by the Methodist Episcopal Church was the chaplaincy with approximately 442 men serving in this way. The Newark Conference provided 12 and the New Jersey Conference 11. From the Conferences these men included:⁴⁶

Newark

J. H. Brown
E. P. Crane
J. P. Daily
John Faull
S. L. Gray
G. W. Harton
J. L. Lenhart
S. T. Moore
B. F. Pritchard
B. F. Simpson
F. L. Wolfe
R. B. Yard

New Jersey

W. T. Abbott
R. Given
J. B. Graw
C. W. Heisley
C. R. Hartraufft
C. E. Hill
J. H. James
F. B. Rose
T. Sovereign
W. C. Stockton
J. White

Two important agencies to aid the soldiers were the Christian Commission and the Sanitary Commission. The Christian Commission organized a vast special ministry to the armies. In November 1861, it was organized by a convention called by the YMCA. It aided the military chaplains by raising money and providing volunteers; it distributed literature and arranged for speedy communications between soldiers and their families. Over 5000 volunteers were involved.⁴⁷ Fourteen ministers from the New Jersey Conference and 9 from the Newark Conference were delegates of the Christian Commission.⁴⁸

The U.S. Sanitary Commission was organized during the summer of 1861 by Henry W. Bellows, a Unitarian minister, intended chiefly to assist the army's medical bureau. It wanted to improve the health, comfort, and morale of the armies by emphasizing modern sanitary and hygienic principles learned from the Crimean, East Indian, and Italian wars. "Through its two hundred agents, it sought persistently to expose problems of sanitation, drainage, preventive medicine, faulty diet, rest camp needs, hospital mismanagement, etc. In short, it served as a vast composite Florence Nightingale, and was an essential component of the war effort."⁴⁹

The resolutions passed by the Conferences in New Jersey seemed to indicate strong verbal support, but these resolutions did not come until 1864 and 1865. The long delay before these important agencies were recognized is puzzling. The Newark Conference in 1862 did resolve

That we deem it the duty of the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ to regard with tenderest concern the moral

and spiritual welfare of our patriot soldiers and sailors, to offer unceasing prayers in their behalf, and to co-operate with the government in providing, in every practicable way, for their religious wants, so that wherever they may go they may still hear the Word of God proclaimed, and that the sick, the wounded, and the dying, may enjoy Christian sympathy and the consolations of religions.⁵⁰

On Monday, March 21, 1864, the Newark Conference was addressed by J. Faull, chaplain of the 33rd New Jersey Volunteers, and was urged "to assist him in furnishing religious reading to his men. He suggested that each Sabbath school raise one dollar and a half for this purpose. The Conference resolved to present this subject to the different charges, and directed that the funds thus raised to be paid over to J.T. Crane for the object named."⁵¹ The Newark Conference lauded the Christian Commission and Sanitary Commission in resolutions at the 1864 and 1865 Conferences while the New Jersey Conference praised only the Sanitary Commission in 1864 alone. In addition to the usual rhetoric of support, the following specific proposal of support for the Christian Commission was passed by the Newark Conference in 1864.

That the preachers on the several districts will keep one of their number in the service of the Christian Commission all the time that the exigencies of the army require, and that the other brethren of the district will supply his appointments during his absence; the Presiding Elder of the district, and two others whom the preachers of the district shall elect, shall be a Committee to superintend the arrangements necessary in carrying out the foregoing proposition.⁵²

Accounts of the response of two communities on behalf of the Christian Commission are illustrative. On April 22, 1861, a Ladies' Relief Society was organized in Orange, New Jersey, and made the first contribution of stores received by the Ladies' Central Association of New York on May 4th. This group was part of the network that became the Christian Commission, but the Orange organization remained independent and proved itself very useful throughout the war.⁵³ It seems reasonable to assume the events in Lambertville were typical of many New Jersey towns:

On Sunday, October 6, 1861, a call was read in the different churches of Lambertville, for a meeting "to consider the subject of supplying clothing and reading-matter to

the troops now in the field for the defence of the Government." The meeting was held the next evening . . . Three days after a Ladies' Aid Society was formed and systematic operations begun. The town was divided into districts and collectors appointed, who solicited monthly subscriptions from all. Festivals and celebrations were held from time to time, to aid in supplying requisite means . . . It was also the custom of the Society to make and put up, at the proper season, quantities of currant jelly, blackberry wine, canned tomatoes, and fruits, pickles, etc. . . Material was purchased for hospital clothing, and the garments cut and manufactured by the ladies. At stated or special meetings their goods were packed and forwarded, carefully invoiced and marked [to the agent or Delegate of the Christian Commission] . . . Many and precious were the letters thus received—from the armies East and West, from various hospitals, and even from Libby Prison,—encouraging and stimulating the noble band of workers to continued endeavors. As the total result of their labors, these ladies raised \$4094.83 in cash, \$1,600 worth of stores, to which was added \$700 worth of sewing upon garments; and as a final offering, \$1,500 toward a monument to the deceased soldiers from their community,—making in all \$7,894.83.⁵⁴

The benevolence of the Conferences also touched specific concerns raised during a session of the Conference. In 1864, the New Jersey Conference heard the Rev. Mr. Paddock of the Kansas Conference concerning life on the frontier and Quantrill's raid and massacre at Lawrence, Kansas. Scenes of horror were described, and it was proposed to raise \$500 "to aid in rebuilding the church which the rebels have destroyed, that weeping widows and orphans may again gather in worship, and receive comfort from the Divine service."⁵⁵ \$350 was raised at once, and it was believed that the rest would be raised later.⁵⁶

Attitudes toward the defeated South varied; but throughout Methodism, the most common reaction was one of vindictiveness toward the Southerners. The call for retribution was sounded by the New Jersey Conference in 1866:

That we exceedingly regret that while the nation has triumphed over the most causeless and flagitious rebellion on record, no adequate punishment has been meted out to the prominent actors in this treason which has clothed the land in mourning and drenched it with the blood of thousands of our fellow citizens.⁵⁷

However, this is quite in contrast to a resolution of the Newark Conference in 1865 that expressed great concern for the people of the South. This seems to be a rare example in Methodism generally but may reflect the tendency of Northern New Jersey to have sympathy for the Southerners and their cause. Whether it reflects Christian charity or the political climate of Northern New Jersey probably can't be answered. But the Conference did resolve

That regarding the great body of the citizens of the Southern States as victims of the craft and wickedness of the few who have involved them in losses and sufferings beyond description, we favor all humane and generous modes of settling the questions at issue between the government and them, so far as the same are compatible with the welfare of the nation and the rights of all who dwell within the national domain.⁵⁸

The other prominent focus of benevolence after the war was the status of the freed slave. The New Jersey Conference resolution in 1866 to support the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association and the lengthy resolution in 1867 are typical of the growing concern. The Conference recognized its responsibility to educate and "christianize" the freedmen and thereby hailed the formation of the national Freedmen's Aid Society, formed a conference society, recommended the taking of a collection during the month of May or June for the cause, and promised cooperation with Rev. Hughes, the agent of the Society in the New Jersey Conference.⁵⁹ The benevolence efforts of New Jersey Methodists did manifest themselves in numerous ways during the war and with concern for the freedmen after the war, but the attitudes toward the South were ambivalent at best and certainly vindictive at worst.

IV

In the midst of the national trauma of Civil War, efforts were made to understand its deeper meaning. What was the cause of the conflagration? For what had so many died? What role would the war play in shaping national character? Historians have struggled with these questions, and it is no surprise that preachers and theologians did as well. William A. Clebsch in a key study of *Christian Interpretations of the Civil War* has written

when we consider the several thousands of thoughtful preachers who saw the conflict and its human and physical

destruction at close range, we are reminded that a considerable expression of thought and molding of opinion about the war came from the studies and pulpits of preachers . . . These pronouncements were not alone in viewing the war as somehow an act of God, for that course was open to all and was chosen by many historians, politicians, and publicists.⁶⁰

Most of the interpretations have looked for a "retributive Providence," either to punish the North or the South, depending on one's viewpoint. In order to provide contrast and comparison for New Jersey preachers, the interpretation rendered by Horace Bushnell, a Hatford pastor, is significant. Bushnell rejected using the key terms of morality, slavery, and the union in his interpretation but instead understood the war as an episode in the creation of a true American nation. The Civil War, for Bushnell was a crisis "through which the United States and its people became aware of being—and indeed actually became—a nation wrought in the fires of history upon the anvil of suffering under the hammer of providential God."⁶¹ The shedding of the blood in war was a great national atonement, a sacrificial and cleansing tragedy that forged a national self-consciousness.⁶²

New Jersey Methodist preachers did not refrain from addressing these same concerns as they looked for the cause of the war and meaning from such national pain. Ruliff Lawrence, in 1863, perceived the government as acting a lie for 85 years and this act as a great sin. The Declaration of Independence claimed equality for all people; but, instead, the nation had enslaved "millions of human beings, depriving them of all liberty and all manhood, buying and selling them as if they were beasts of the field." Lawrence believed it was more sinful to act a lie than to speak one.⁶³

Lewis Dunn, Methodist Pastor in Morristown, was able to see the war as a baptism of fire to purify political corruption. He also found that God's law had been ignored, His name blasphemed, and Sabbaths were being desecrated.

The very atmosphere, in many localities was befouled with blasphemy and obscenity, and the land was burdened with abominations. But, thank heaven! the thunder storm now raging will, I trust, purify the moral and political atmosphere; and this fearful baptism of fire and blood will fit us the better to answer our high destiny.⁶⁴

He returns to the themes of baptism and purification in the climax of the oration.

I cannot think for a moment that our Government or nation is to be destroyed. This baptism of blood, these scenes of trial through which we are now passing, will only purify and strengthen us. These stripes He inflicts are only to discipline and improve us.⁶⁵

Isaac W. Wiley, Methodist clergyman and principal of the Pennington School, delivered two lectures at Temperance Hall, Trenton, February 16 and 23, 1864, with the titles, "How We Got In" and "How to Get Out." While slavery appears to be the cause of the war, the real cause is deeper in the moral fibre of the country.

[Slavery] has been mighty; but tenfold more mighty has been that degeneracy of society, that corruption of the community; that hardening of hearts, that searing of consciences, that development of a thirst for gold, that ambition for lawlessness and aristocracy, that is the fruit of slavery itself, that has led us into this conflict.⁶⁶

Wiley understood that the way out of the war was to prosecute it to the fullest extent. He had no sympathy for the peace initiatives of the state, but in Northern dealings with the South he wanted to "whip it out of them." The South had "drawn down upon themselves a terrible judgment from the hand of God"⁶⁷ and God was acting in the war. Wiley said, "God has come upon the stage and is working in this nation."⁶⁸ When he was accused of being blood-thirsty, he replied, "No, I can only look upon it as the highest Christianity, and I can only see in it the purest charity, to go vigorously and earnestly at work, and bring it to an end as speedily as possible."⁶⁹

Rev. S.J. Morris, in a sermon preached in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Pine Brook, N.J. on April 23, 1865, placed responsibility for the war with the men of the south and the institution of slavery. The war was then aided and abetted by the peace men of the north of which New Jersey had many. Morris believed that the results of the war would be that the people would love their government more, that the government would be stronger, that the people would watch more jealously the institutions and liberties of their country, and that as a nation the people would be led to trust more in God.⁷⁰ The war, arising out of the evil of slavery, would ultimately serve a useful role in the national life.

Rev. Robert B. Yard, former Army chaplain, could also find the suffering of war giving way to a new future and the hope of a fresh vision. The death of Lincoln would produce a sturdier purpose for the country.

We were scarcely ready for the future that is opening so grandly upon us, until sanctified by the baptism of disappointment and suffering. We stand today in the portals of a Beulah in national history; a glad morning unfolds its blushing beauties after a long night. . . . The future of the whole country is hopeful—that of the South, especially.⁷¹

Continuing this positive note, Yard found that, overall, the war had produced little suffering in comparison with its immense benefits! After remembering the pain and death of thousands he wrote

But here ceases the sad record. Beyond the lives and health of our brave soldiery, the nation has suffered but little, Commerce has revived, and plenty abounds . . . If we gain then the settlement of grave questions of Humanity, Civilization, and Government; if the last vestiges of the terrible woe of Slavery be removed, we may claim the good obtained to have been cheaply purchased.⁷²

Common to Methodist understanding was the theme that in the midst of the tragedy of war, God's guiding hand was perceived and that even this immense evil could be a source of good.

New Jersey Methodists were slow to support abolitionist resolutions and did not provide significant leadership in the great events surrounding the Civil War; but they did support the war effort, engage in much benevolence and relief of suffering, and proved to embody much stronger anti-slavery sentiment than the New Jersey population as a whole. While they may not have been as progressive as their Methodist counterparts throughout the North, they certainly were far ahead of the New Jersey Legislature in their views on slavery and their willingness to help the former slave, once freed. New Jersey Methodists had not neglected their responsibilities to society during these years but found themselves at the point of conflict between the attitudes of Northern Methodists and the citizenry of New Jersey.

NOTES

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

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7. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 12; New Jersey Conference, p. 12.
8. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 27.
9. Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 200.
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22. Joseph B. Dobbins, *The Bible Against Slavery; a vindication of the sacred Scriptures against the charge of authorizing slavery*, (Philadelphia: King) and Baird, 1864), p. 3.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
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26. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 22.
27. *Minutes*, New Jersey, 1865, p. 24.
28. *Minutes*, New Jersey, p. 27.
29. Sweet, p. 8.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
31. Stokes, p. 43.
32. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 26.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
34. *Minutes*, New Jersey, p. 17.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.
36. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 38.
37. *Minutes*, New Jersey, p. 27.
38. Lewis Romaine Dunn, *An Oration delivered at Morristown, N. J., July 4, 1863*, (Morristown, NJ: A. A. Vance, 1863), p. 10.
39. Knapp, pp. 63-64.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
41. Dunn, p. 17.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
43. Yard, pp. 9-10.

44. New Jersey Methodist State Convention, Trenton, 1870, *Minutes of the New Jersey Methodist State Convention, Held in Trenton, N. J., Sept. 27-29, 1870*, (Trenton: W. T. Nicholson, 1870), p. 17.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
46. Sweet, p. 192.
47. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, Vol. 2, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1975), pp. 126-127.
48. names listed in Sweet, pp. 197-207.
49. Ahlstrom, pp. 127-128.
50. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 26.
51. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 10.
52. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 38.
53. Lemuel Moss, *Annals of the United States Christian Commission*, (Philadelphia, 1868), p. 75.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 643-644.
55. *Minutes*, New Jersey, p. 9.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
57. *Minutes*, New Jersey, p. 27.
58. *Minutes*, Newark, p. 22.
59. *Minutes*, New Jersey, 1867, p. 24.
60. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 4-5.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
63. Stokes, p. 80.
64. Dunn, p. 15.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
66. Isaac William Wiley, *How We Got In. How to Get Out*, Two lectures delivered at Temperance Hall, Trenton, N. J. on February 16 & 23, 1864, reported by James Ristine, A.M., (Trenton, N. J.: Thomas U. Baker, 1864), pp. 30-31.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
70. Samuel James Morris, *A Sermon on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, preached in the M.E. Church, Pine Brook, N. J., April 23, 1865, (Newark: A. Stephen Holbrook, 1865), p. 11.
71. Yard, p. 19.
72. Yard, p. 22.

A VALUABLE SOURCE FOR HISTORY

by

Dr. J. Hillman Coffee

When a person begins to research the history of a church or wishes to find when a certain building program took place, in addition to the records kept by the local church, the Yearbook and Minutes of the Conference are a great resource. One of the sources in the Conference Minutes is the reports of the District Superintendents. This office was known as the Presiding Eldership until the General Conference of 1908 changed its name to District Superintendency.

One of the important records preserved in the report of these leaders is the information concerning the founding of new churches. The 1900 minutes record on page fifty-three that "Two new Methodist Episcopal Churches have been organized—one at West Berlin, the other at National Park." We find in the report of J. W. Graw, Presiding Elder of the Trenton District, on page seventeen of the Conference Minutes for 1888 that "New churches are projected at Beach Haven; Bridgeport; Union Street, Trenton; Hamilton Avenue, Trenton; Simpson, Trenton; Harrisville, and Delair." What a busy year for this district! The other districts, however, report new churches also being established.

We can also follow the building programs of the churches of the Conference in these reports. In 1885, on page fifteen, the Rev. D. H. Schock, Presiding Elder of the Trenton District, reports "During the year the new church at Mr. Holly has been completed. It is a brown stone building, with all the essentials of the Methodist Church. It was dedicated in May; Bishop Wiley, Dr. Buckley, and General Fisk assisted at the dedication. All the debt was provided for, by subscription, on the day of dedication. We have here a church property valued at \$40,000." In the 1910 minutes, on page 69, we find the following: "Our church at Haddonfield has purchased a most eligible lot on Madison Avenue at a cost of \$7,000. By the generosity of Mr. Henry D. Moore, a Presbyterian, whose interest in our common Christianity is expressed by a gift of \$5,000 in cash, and by the contributions of our people there, the entire site has been paid. Plans have been adopted for a church and Sunday School temple. The cost will be about \$35,000." In 1888, page 16, we read "The First Church, Salem, has erected a new and beautiful Church, on the site of the old one, 58 x 75 feet." Again in 1888, page 12,

we read "A new church is to be erected in Woodbury, the county seat of Gloucester, and one of the most thriving and beautiful towns in this section of the State, and a point where Methodism needs a commanding position. Providentially, God raised up a Friend who, for the sake of his mother, who was a member of the church in this place, proposed, upon the condition of the church raising \$15,000, to purchase a new site and defray all other expense of building, etc."

In the reports we find mention of fires that destroyed churches. On page fifty-three of the 1900 minutes, the Presiding Elder, G. L. Dobbins, reports "Three churches were burned during the year: One at Elm, April 4, 1899; another at Hedding, January 19; the third at Downer, February 6." Another type of fire is recorded in the minutes under the same date, page fifty-seven, "Revival fires have been kindled in many places and in some were kept burning for weeks and months. The reports of these men of the cabinet all contain the numbers of the conversions as the result of the spirit filled churches."

Information can be found about the building of parsonages in the minutes. I refer to the 1900 minutes, again, on page fifty-five. "A new parsonage has been erected at Asbury Park for First Church . . . At West Grove, the trustees have done marvellously in the erection of one of the finest parsonages in the Conference . . . At Belmar, also, a parsonage of modern style has been built." The report mentions that at Belmar the pastors had lived in rented houses. It was found more reasonable to build a parsonage on the church property than to continue to rent. Many other congregations built parsonages, as we find recorded in the conference minutes. "At Allentown, the old parsonage has been sold, and a new one is being erected upon the lot adjoining the church, to cost two thousand dollars." This was reported in the 1885 Conference Minutes, page fifteen.

There is a wealth of material found in the Conference Minutes concerning various projects of improvements for the churches or parsonages. A few examples of these are found on page fifty of the 1898 minutes. "The church at Goshen, . . . has been improved by the erection of a spire, and painted at a cost of \$600, which was raised. . . . The church at Franklinville . . . has been moved to an eligible site in the village and is being enlarged and improved, and when completed, will be a beautiful, little country church. . . . Trinity

Church, Millville, is removing the dead from the cementary beside the church, which will greatly improve the appearance of our property there. The work is being prosecuted with care and tact by the trustees, under the advice of B. C. Lippincott, pastor." There is another kind of death as recorded on page sixty-one. "First Church, Borden-town, is still alive, though some have thought it ought to die. Indeed, it has been said to be already dead; if so, it is a very lively corpse. All the current expenses are met in full. I am glad," says S. W. Lake, P. E., "this church can be sustained for many reasons, but especially because it is a charge where ministers' children may obtain excellent educational advantages."

Many miscellaneous facts can be found in the Minutes. One can find when churches put electric lights in churches and parsonages, when organs or pianos were purchased, and when iron fences were put around properties as reported on page sixty-two in the 1898 minutes. Through a period in the early 1900's, one finds that many churches put metal ceilings in their churches. In 1925, "an automobile has been purchased for the use of the pastor on the Rancocas Circuit, and another one for the pastor's use on the Pointville Circuit." Many, many more such facts can be found if the time is taken to search the conference minutes.

Read the following excerpts from the Minutes and think about our history.

Belford—Brother Boyd has proven himself a master workman. The congregations have crowded the building and supported the pastor in all his work. The Epworth League has followed his leadership, and has erected the first Institutional Church building within the bounds of the Conference. . . . Bradley Beach, known as "the little church in the woods," is not behind some of its more pretentious neighbors in all the characteristics of a successful church. (Minutes, 1898, p. 56.)

At Manahawkin, a society has been formed composed of the citizens of the place, both members and non-members of the church, which society has assumed the payment of the mortgages against the church, amounting to four thousand dollars. This generous movement deserves a public recognition and our heartiest thanks. (Minutes, 1885, p. 15.)

The First Church, Camden, T. S. Brock, Pastor, claims to have one of the largest junior choirs in Methodism, numbering 131 children. (Minutes, 1925, p. 51.)

Not only are there references to church and parsonage facts, to increase in pastors' salaries, to debts on the churches, but there are also word pictures of individuals. Let me share, first, a reference to a very effective lay person, Mrs. Mae Nelson, reported by H. J. Belting, D.S. Mrs. Nelson is the mother of Rev. Carlton Nelson of our Conference. A second reference is to a Presiding Elder and a look at a part of his year's work as found in the closing paragraph in his report to Conference.

Attention must be given to the wonderful work being done by Mrs. Mae Nelson at Sea Brook Farms. During the last eleven months, this consecrated woman has had charge of five Sunday Schools, two new ones being organized recently. There are five nationalities in their membership. As an illustration of the nature and amount of work being done, I submit the following resume: Over 1800 personal calls were made, 350 Sunday School lessons taught, 5,800 Sunday School papers, 2,200 cards, 36 Bibles, 61 Gospels, 1,300 magazines, 302 books and 154 Scripture cards were distributed, in addition to which 900 garments were given to those in need. (Minutes, 1925, p. 48.)

I have done what I could to promote the work of God in all parts of the District. I have preached from three to eight times a week, held the Quarterly Conference, visited many of the Sunday Schools, held love feasts, assisted in revival services, addressed twenty-five centennial meetings, besides assisting many of the pastors in personal efforts to advance the efforts of their charges. I have been cordially received everywhere, and have had the cooperation of pastors and people in my work. I am truly grateful to the brethren for their kindness, and devoutly thankful to Almighty God for all His mercies. I have not lost one hour on account of illness during the year, and have greatly enjoyed the work for the Master. (Minutes, 1885, p. 12.)

Secure some old minutes and read through them, especially the Presiding Elders' and District Superintendents' reports. Search for historical records of your church. Many items are entertaining and can be amusing as we look back on them today. The greatest value we can receive is from the inspiration we will have as we read of the blessings of God upon our fellow Methodists of the past. Their struggles were severe; their sacrifices were many; and their lives were effective in the work of the Lord.

An Excerpt from the Journal of the
REV. FREEBORN GARRETTSON

by

Robert B. Steelman

Rev. Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827) was one of the outstanding leaders of early American Methodism. Born on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, he travelled widely in his early years as a Circuit Rider. He even spent three years as a missionary to Nova Scotia. In 1793, he married Catherine Livingston, a member of a powerful and aristocratic family in New York State. Though maintaining a comfortable home at Rhinebeck, he continued in the work as a travelling preacher and presiding elder.

His Journal is fairly complete to 1791. Thereafter it is rather sketchy and for many years non-existent. Appointed to Delaware in 1779, he records in his Journal a brief visit to New Jersey.

"Sept. 22, 1779—This morning I left the City of Philadelphia, and set out for the lower Jerseys. I preached by candlelight at Br. Chews¹ with very little happiness. The next day I had a very good time at a School House.

"Oct. 1, I preached at a little town with some liberty; in the evening I held forth at Gordens. I had much sweetness. Blessed be God. I spent the evening very comfortably at Capt. Sterlings.² Sun. 2, I met with various temptations and trials. I gave a love-feast in the morning. Glory be to God, it was a blessed time to many precious souls. My soul was refreshed. At 12 O.C. I preached in the barn from these words: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." It was a very powerful time. In the evening I held forth at Woodstown. It was a blessed time indeed. I lodged at the house of a Moravian. It seemed to be a precious family. I had much comfort.

"Mon. 3, I rode many miles to Mr. Sterlings. In the evening preached with more freedom at Salem in the Court house; the people seemed to be much melted. I lodged with a very kind friend, though his family was very much divided.

"Oct. 4, This morning I left and rode to a few of the neighbors with satisfaction. We rode 6 miles; I preached by candlelight. I

was much distressed, but Glory be to God in family prayer the Lord paid us a sweet visit.

"Wed. 5, I returned to Salem and preached to a crowded assembly with much freedom. I praise God for his love. I rode about 6 miles to very kind friends, in this family my spirit was refreshed.

"Thurs. 6, The word was attended with much power morning and evening. Glory be to God, this is a day of love to my soul.

"Fri. 7, This morning I set out for the City."

It is regrettable that there is no Journal when he was presiding elder for all of New Jersey in 1799.

NOTES

1. Probably Jesse Chew who lived in Mantua. Asbury preached at his home as early as 1772.
2. Captain James Sterling was one of the early Methodists in N. J., a friend of both Abbott and Asbury. His home was in Burlington, but he frequently travelled with the preachers. His name appears on early deeds as trustee as far away as Port Elizabeth.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

As part of our continuing research for a new Conference History planned for our 150th Anniversary in 1986, your Historian was sent for a week's research in February to Drew University. It was a privilege to be able to use their extensive collection of Methodist material—books, microfilms, and manuscripts.

Among the material used was a collection of Gen. Clinton B. Fisk papers, early letters of professor John McClintock, Abel Stevens Scrapbooks on Slavery and the M. E. Church, files of Dr. Harold Paul Sloan material, early reports of the Freedmen's Aid Society and the Women's Home Missionary Society. Books looked at dealt with such matters as the holiness movement, Camp Meetings, the Methodist Protestant Church in New Jersey, and an 1870 N. J. Methodist State Convention held in Trenton.

You can be of help by searching for records of District and Conference Agencies, old Circuit books and other material you think may have value for the Conference Archives. There is much useful material hidden in churches and attics that needs to be preserved in the Conference Archives. Please see that all such material gets into my hands or that of Dr. Hillman Coffee or is taken to our Archives Room at Pennington School.

We are endeavoring to provide better service by having someone in the Archives Room on the last Tuesday of every month. This way we can more quickly answer queries and assist anyone who may want help in doing research.

Publications still available from the Society are the "1792 Journal of the Rev. Richard Swain," copies can be ordered from our Financial Secretary at \$2.25, postpaid. Two other helpful resources available from the historian are "Services and Resources for Worship on Historic Occasions" and "Guidelines for Local Church Historians and Records and History Committees." These are \$1.25 each, postpaid.

You are invited to support the work of our Society by becoming a member. Dues are \$3.00 per person or \$5.00 a couple. Benjamin

Abbott Life Memberships for individuals or churches are available for \$50. Dues money should be sent to our Financial Secretary, Mrs. Edna Molyneaux, 768 East Garden Road, Vineland, N. J. 08360.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE
SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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